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**BAUCUS, GRASSLEY RENEW CALL FOR SOCIAL SECURITY
SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS**

*Finance Leaders commit to ensure adequate resources for improved service,
accommodation of claims increase*

Washington, D.C. – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) and Ranking Member Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) expressed serious concern today about the poor level of many services provided to the public at the Social Security Administration's (SSA) approximately 1300 local field offices, including office wait times in excess of two hours in some cases, and the great difficulty reaching the field offices by telephone. A final Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on service issues at SSA's field offices found that poor levels of many services were due to staffing shortages as a result of inadequate funding for SSA's administrative costs. GAO recommended that SSA develop clear standards to establish a minimum level of quality for services provided to the public.

"The Social Security Administration has pressing issues on its hands with service concerns in the field offices and the impending rise in claims as the baby boom generation reaches retirement and the economy worsens. It is totally unacceptable to have elderly and disabled visitors to some of SSA's field offices waiting more than two hours for service. GAO even found that in 2 of 21 offices visited, there was no one answering the phone at all," said Baucus. **"If we do nothing, these inadequate levels of service could get even worse with the projected increase in the number of claims for benefits being filed at SSA. I call on SSA to establish clear minimum standards for the services it delivers to the public, and I will work to make sure SSA gets sufficient funding to fulfill its obligation to the American people."**

"Clearly, Social Security beneficiaries deserve better service. More money is only part of the answer. The Social Security Administration has staffing shortages, disability backlogs, and deferred workloads that must be addressed. In the short-run, this can only be done with additional resources. But, throwing money at the problem is not a long-term solution. Social Security policies, systems, and procedures are in need of a major overhaul. It takes two to three years, or three to four years, to fully train a field office employee. That's longer than it takes NASA to train an astronaut. Of course, anyone who has taken a look at the SSI deeming rules, or the workers' compensation offset rules, knows just how complicated these programs have become. But, it doesn't have to be that way and Congress should identify ways to reduce administrative complexity and improve program integrity," Grassley said.

The report also indicated that insufficient funding contributed to low numbers of Continuing Disability Reviews (CDRs) being performed each year. Beneficiaries of SSA's disability programs are supposed to be examined periodically to determine if they are still eligible for disability benefits. It is estimated that conducting CDRs saves \$10 for every dollar spent on them, as beneficiaries who no longer require these benefits are removed from the program.

The Senate Finance Committee has jurisdiction over the Social Security program. The GAO report is available here: <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d0924.pdf>

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